DOCUMENT RESUME

ED 255 925 CS 208 830

AUTHOR McCleary, William J.
TITLE The Movement from Personal to Group Identity in Expressive Discourse.
PUB DATE 22 Mar 85
NOTE 25p.; Paper presented at the Annual Meeting of the Conference on College Composition and Communication (36th, Minneapolis, MN, March 21-23, 1985).
PUB TYPE Viewpoints (120) -- Speeches/Conference Papers (150)

EDRS PRICE MF01/PC01 Plus Postage.
DESCRIPTORS Discourse Analysis; Educational Theories; Expressive Language; *Identification (Psychology); Literary Genres; *Self Expression; *Writing Processes; Writing Skills
IDENTIFIERS Discourse Modes; *Expressive Writing; Kinneavy (James)

ABSTRACT

A number of questions have been raised about James Kinneavy's theory of expressive discourse, among them the problem of how so many different genres, from the personal essay to the declaration of independence, can be lumped under one aim, self-expression. Another is why self-expression is the only one of the aims to be divided into two general types (personal and group). Nearly all such questions are cleared up if self-expression is seen as a process, a movement from personal to group identity. An individual at first works to find his or her own identity and set personal goals. However, in the meantime, the individual discovers that other people are going through similar processes and that many goals can be achieved only by cooperation with like-minded people. These discoveries then lead to the formation of a group and the composing of the various kinds of discourse required to identify and regulate the group, for example, a declaration of independence and a loyalty oath. Seen in this way, any specific expressive discourse is a step in a process, or potential process, of movement from individual to group identity. Although the three "logical strategies" posited by Kinneavy will still underlie the various genres of expression, such matters as organization and style will be controlled as much by the stage of the processs as by the expressive aim itself. (Author/HTH)

****
* Reproductions supplied by EDRS are the best that can be made *
* from the original document. *
****

U.S. DEPARTMENT OF EDUCATION
NATIONAL INSTITUTE OF EDUCATION
EDUCATIONAL RESOURCES INFORMATION
CENTER (ERIC)
X This document has been reproduced as received from the person or organization originating it.
☐ Minor changes have been made to improve reproduction quality.
• Points of view or opinions stated in this document do not necessarily represent official NIE position or policy.

ED255925

THE MOVEMENT FROM PERSONAL TO GROUP IDENTITY IN EXPRESSIVE DISCOURSE

William J. McCleary

Genesee Community College

Batavia, New York

"PERMISSION TO REPRODUCE THIS MATERIAL HAS BEEN GRANTED BY
William J. McCleary
TO THE EDUCATIONAL RESOURCES INFORMATION CENTER (ERIC)."

Paper presented to the Conference on College Composition and Communication, March 22, 1985

CS 208 830

ABSTRACT

A number of questions have been raised about James Kinneavy's theory of expressive discourse, among them the problem of how so many different genres, from the personal essay to a declaration of independence, can be lumped under one aim, self-expression. Another is why self-expression is the only one of the aims to be divided into two general types (personal and group).

Nearly all of such questions are cleared up if self-expression is seen as a process, a movement from personal to group identity. An individual at first works to find his or her own identity and set personal goals. However, in the meantime, the individual discovers that other people are going through similar processes and that many goals can only be achieved by cooperation with like-minded people. These discoveries then lead to the formation of a group and the composing of the various kinds of discourses required to identify and regulate the group, for example, a declaration of independence and a loyalty oath.

Seen in this way, any specific expressive discourse is a step in a process, or potential process, of movement from individual to group identity. Although underlying the various genres of expression will still be the three "logical strategies" posited by Kinneavy, such matters as organization and style will be controlled as much by the stage of the process as by the expressive aim itself.

THE MOVEMENT FROM PERSONAL TO GROUP IDENTITY IN EXPRESSIVE DISCOURSE

William J. McCleary

Genesee Community College

A number of questions have been raised about James Kinneavy's theory of expressive discourse as given in his book A Theory of Discourse (Englewood Cliffs, N.J.: Prentice-Hall, 1971). One is the problem of how so many different genres, from the personal essay to a declaration of independence, can be lumped under one aim, self-expression. Another is why self-expression is the only one of the aims to be divided into two general types, personal and social, without treating these types as separate aims the way that is done with the three types of referential discourse. I propose to suggest a solution to these questions, a solution which suggests that there are not infinite processes of self-expression but, by and large, only one; and that there are not two types of self-expression, individual and social, but only one--although it is often convenient to continue talking about two types.

Before I get into the main topic, though, let me fill a little background for those who may be unfamiliar with Kinneavy's theory of discourse. Kinneavy posits that there are four primary aims of discourse--literature, self-expression, persuasion, and reference--and that reference

discourse comes in three varieties--information, science, and exploration--which Kinneavy treats almost as though they are separate aims:

THE AIMS OF DISCOURSE

1. Literature
2. Self-expression
3. Persuasion
4. Reference
    a. Information
    b. Science
    c. Exploration

Within the expressive aim, then, Kinneavy lists a great many genres of self-expression and divides them into two categories, individual and social, as can be seen below. It is the only one of the aims to be divided in this way.

SELF-EXPRESSION

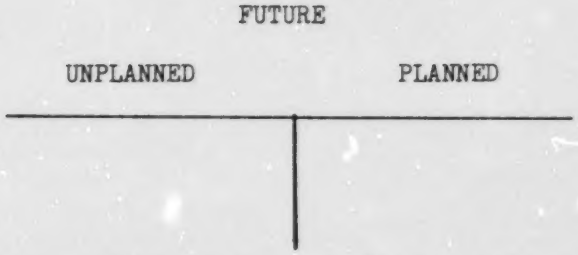
Of Individual	Of Social
Conversation	Minority protests
Journals	Manifestoes
Diaries	Declarations of independence
Gripe sessions	Contracts
Prayer	Constitutions of clubs
	Myth
	Utopia plans
	Religious credos

(from p. 61 of A Theory of Discourse)

This list, long though it is, does not exhaust the total genres of expressive discourse that Kinneavy and others have sometimes mentioned. For instance, it doesn't include the two types that most concern writing teachers, the personal essay and the autobiography. However, to follow Kinneavy's theory, what all genres have in common is that they cover the same three basic kinds of material--a <u>self</u>, who is doing the expressing; some <u>others</u>, who both influence the self and help to define it; and the <u>world</u>, which provides both a sphere for the self to operate within and a set of instruments for the self to use in reaching the its goals. For reasons I won't take time to explain here, Kinneavy refers to these three concepts as <u>being for self</u>, <u>being-for-others</u>, and <u>being-in-the-world</u>. Also included is a time dimension, in which the self sets goals for the future but examines the past and present to help in setting the goals. These two dimensions are often diagrammed in the following way:

	PAST	PRESENT	FUTURE
Being-for-self			
Being-for-others			
Being-in-the-world			

In addition to these dimensions, it's common to divide the "future" into two kinds of possible futures: the "unplanned future," or what will happen if no plans are made to change one's life, and the "planned future," or the goals that one hopes to achieve:



What all expressive discourses have in common, then, is a concern for time and for the three aspects of the self. Although almost all expressive discourses also have aspects that are persuasive, referential, or literary, if the main purpose of the writer or speaker of self-expression is to define himself or herself on these dimensions, then the discourse is said to be expressive. Short genres, like the personal essay, may cover only a few of the dimensions, or only a small portion of each dimension. More substantial genres, like a full autobiography, may attempt to cover every aspect of all dimensions.

THE PURPOSE OF SELF-EXPRESSION: AN EMPHASIS ON GOALS

Above all else, though, self-expression is concerned with goals, and setting goals is the ultimate purpose of self-expression, though a particular piece writing may not refer to goals. Kinneavy follows Sartre and other philosophers, particularly the existentialists, in saying that a human is mainly defined by goals, that without goals a self is less than a real person. As Kinneavy says, "Expression is therefore the structuring of a field of reality in order to realize a project, and this realization gives self-hood to the For-Itself." Earlier he also says, "To attain selfhood, therefore, the For-Itself must necessarily involve itself with the world and with others in the process of working towards specific goals. This carrying out of a project is the essence of the act of expression" (A Theory of Discourse, p. 401).

When we add goals to the mix, then, we can see the overall point to writing expressive discourse. There is a "self" who is using the past to figure out how he or she came to the present situation and what the future will be like if things continue as they are going. The self then rejects all or part of the perceived future and sets goals for a different and better future. "Others," then, both help the self to figure out these matters and aid the self in reaching the goals, while the "world" both provides a place in which to operate and a set of instruments for reaching goals.

In most cases, we can imagine that working toward goals is a fairly straightforward matter, since estblished means already exist by which others can help selves use the instruments of the world to accomplish goals. For our students, for example, their parents are the "others" who held them select a college and pay for it, while the college is the world in which they are operating and the instrument by which many hope to reach their goals--to become a lawyer, a doctor, an accountant, or whatever. We hope that the students have chosen the goals of their education by means of expressive discourse in whatever form seems appropriate: discussion with parents and friends, diaries, self-analysis, and so on. (And we suspect that many, regrettably, do not do anything like this.) But once the goal has been set, there is an institution, there are appropriate laws, there are people appointed, there is time set aside--nearly everything necessary to help students reach their goals. The same is true of a whole host of other goals and projects that any of us might wish to undertake. Do we wish to become model railroaders, butterfly collectors, campers, word processors? Not to worry. The means to enable us to reach the goals are readily at hand.

DISCOVERING THE NEED FOR OTHERS

That is the normal situation, then. The self, worrying just about himself or herself, sets goals either by means of self-expression or in other ways, and then sets out in pursuit of the goals using the means which society provides. Suppose, however, that the means are not at hand; suppose, in others words, that society does not provide that which a person needs to accomplish the goals. Worse, suppose that society in general or some particular persons within society actively oppose one's goals and put obstacles in the way. To imagine the worst possible case, perhaps it would even mean death if society knew what the self wanted to become. What is the self to do?

Well, if there is only one person in this fix, that person is often stuck. However, such isolation is seldom the case. Whatever the goal and impediments, there are usually others in the same situation. And eventually the various person in this fix recognize each others' existence. Perhaps they listen to each others' gripes, or perhaps, in a larger matter, they read what each other has written. In fact, one self may write an essay or a book specifically pointing out that a whole group of frustrated selves exists. This is often called "consciousness raising." In other words, each self discovers that it is not alone, and discourse, both oral and written, is a necessary means to such a discovery.

What's next? Well, it is normal for one of more persons in the group to remember what other frustrated people have done in similar circumstances. Other people have banded together to solve the problem, and so the individual selves do what others have done. They add a group identity to their individual identities, probably surrendering a little of their personal identities to do so. They form a group, they declare their

independence from the existing state of affairs, they draw up a constitution and a set of by-laws, they write a creed or an oath, they have a secret handshake, a secret knock. Together they work for the goal that each of them needs individually, and together they have the chance of success that each self by itself could not have hoped for.

To a certain extent, the group is simply a means to an end for the individuals in the group. That is, the group helps each individual reach a goal that he or she could not have reached alone. I often refer to this as the American view of the purpose of a group--as opposed to the collectivist, or Soviet, view in which the goals of the group take on a life of their own. However, it seems normal that even in individualistic America groups tend to become more than just a convenient way for individuals to reach their own individual goals. Working for the "common good" is somehow more inspiring, more lofty, than grubbing after one's own goals. Perhaps this is because the success of the group often requires sacrificing individuals to the common cause, as in war and revolution, for example, a cause that requires some powerful persuasion about the virtues of the people who belong to the group. Whatever the case, though, it is clear that a group, while formed primarily to help the individual, becomes more than a mere collection of individuals.

VIEWING SELF-EXPRESSION AS A PROCESS

More important for our present discussion is to note that there is a process going on, a process of moving from personal to group identity (and, perhaps, back again to the individual). Therefore, each piece of self-expression of whatever genre may be seen as part of the process, part of an actual or potential movement from individual identity to the formation of a group identity. In other words, an individual piece of self-expression can

be seen as occupying a point on a continuum between the most private self-expression, such as a diary, and the most public, such as a constitution or a statements of goals. The chart on the following page shows one way that we might diagram the process.

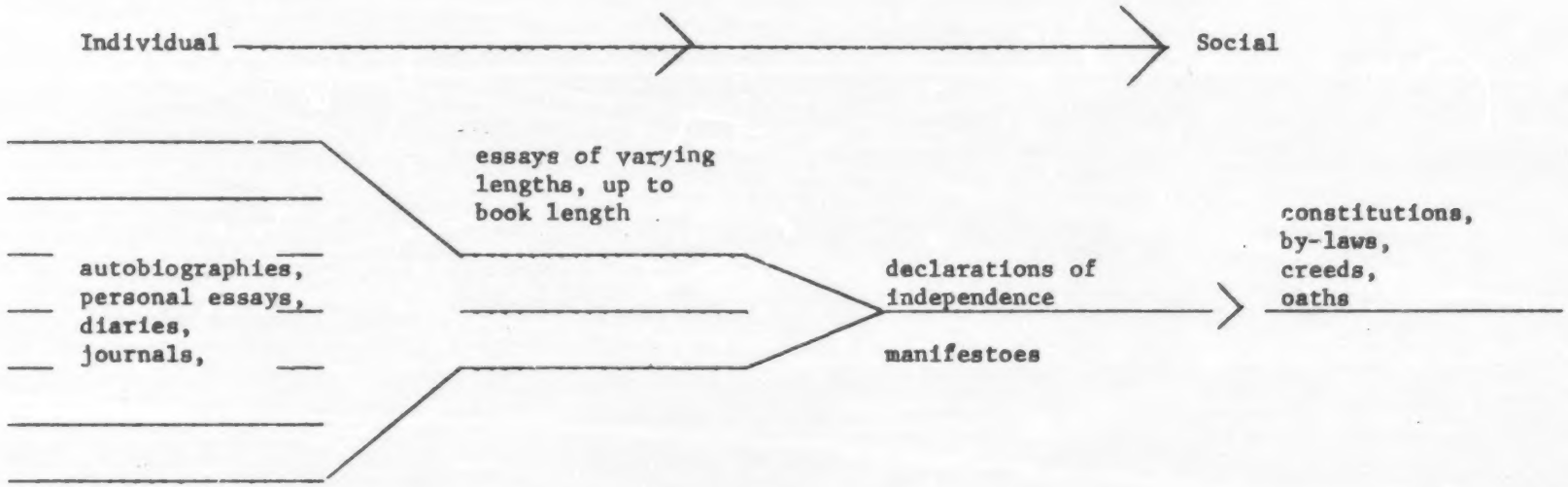
To imagine a concrete example that writing teachers can relate to, suppose you are hired as the writing specialist at a certain college, and you are to work in an English Department run, as usual, by specialists in literature. You would, I assume, have the usual goals of a college professor--to earn tenure, to increase in salary and prestige as you grow older, and to sit around in later years wearing a tweed jacket, smoking a pipe, and looking wise. Then reality sets in. You discover that the English Department never wanted to hire a writing specialist (the dean forced you on the department), and now that you are on board, the worst fears of the department are realized. Not only have you never heard of deconstructionism or Stanley Fish, but you mumble constantly about arcane matters such as Z scores and Chi Squares. The department may have been forced to take you in, but hell will freeze over before any professor of literature will recommend tenure for the likes of you. And as the lone writing specialist in a department of literary specialists, you have few if any allies to help you reach your goals.

Faced with this dilemma, what are you to do? You might try to get around the problem by publishing in both literature and in composition theory, or you might simply conceal your true interests. I have known writing specialists who practiced either or both of these deceptions. However, sometimes the deceptions don't work, or you rebel against the necessity of wasting your time writing the umpteenth study of some Shakespearean play. Yet, by yourself there's nothing much you can do to protect yourself from the "literary crowd." However, when you go to CCCC

WJM 2/82

PROGRESSION FROM INDIVIDUAL TO GROUP CONSCIOUSNESS

IN EXPRESSIVE DISCOURSE



(Individuals analyze their lives, complain about fates, search for independence and rights)

(Individuals recognize that others have similar problems, point out this fact in essays--"consciousness-raising")

(The group organizes)

(The group becomes a formal organization or institution)

STYLE: Moving from Individual to Social

Informal, idiosyncratic → Becoming formal → Highly formal/stylized

and complain to your friends about the situation, you discover that you are not alone. All over the country writing specialists are being treated shabbily by English departments. Perhaps your professional journals even publish some letters or articles detailing the crimes of a particular English department against its writing specialist. It's only one more step on the road to group consciousness, then, for some rabble rouser like Maxine Hairston* to suggest that writing specialists quit crying in their beer and DO SOMETHING about their plight. Perhaps writing programs need to declare their independence from English departments, and perhaps a group must be formed to pressure colleges and universities to recognize the need and right of independence.

In our own society, this process of liberation occurs time and again. In fact, we have set up our government to permit this process. This can be seen in the Constitution where are set out the rights of the individuals to assemble and, if necessary, to petition the government for relief of their problems. And so we see the formation of groups throughout the land. Black power. Women's Liberation. Grey power. Gay Liberation. Labor unions. Animal rights. The National Council of Teachers of English. The Conference on College Composition and Communication. This nation is loaded with liberation-seeking groups--groups of people who need each other if each member is to reach a desired goal.

EDUCATING STUDENTS ABOUT THE EXPRESSIVE PROCESS

One would think then, with movement from individual to group so endemic to land, that the process would be a major focus of a humanistic

---

*Maxine Hairston, professor of English at the University of Texas at Austin, author of several textbooks, and chair of CCCC, gave a speech like this at the 1985 CCCC.

education, especially in the humanities. Not so, however. There is some study of autobiography but usually of autobiography as a form of art or history, not of autobiography as a form of self-expression. There is some study of expressive essays but more often again as an art form or, at the most, the feelings of an individual--not of expressive essays as part of a movement. There is some study of the U.S. Declaration of Independence and the U.S. Constitution, but none of declarations and constitutions in general. And of oaths, creeds, manifestoes, by-laws, and other forms of group expression, little is said at all. In the late sixties and early seventies expressive rhetorics and anthologies enjoyed a brief boom of popularity, but one seldom sees them anymore.

If the humanities won't include the study of expressive discourse, one would think that the social sciences might. That is, the genres of expressive writing could be studied as an aspect of society in psychology, sociology, anthropology, or political science courses, but to my knowledge that is seldom done. Psychology is the study of the individual psyche and sociology of the group psyche, but little is said about the relationships between the two. And in political science students may study individual documents of self-expression such as a constitution but never the concept of group self-expression that is embodied in the act of writing a constitution.

Finally, one would think that, in a writing class, the study of how to write a constitution would be at least as important as the study of how to write a research paper. After all, outside college a person is as likely to become involved in the writing of a constitution as in the writing of a research paper. However, to my knowledge such is not the case. While I know many teachers who assign and explain expressive papers, I also know others who never assign expressive writing at all, much less

group expressive writing. I suppose that somewhere there are teachers who assign group essays or other genres of group expression, but I have never met any.

It is one of my dreams that someday, somewhere, someone will let me teach a college writing course consisting of nothing but expressive discourse. I'm not talking about a basic skills course where expressive discourse is the primary vehicle for practicing writing skills. I want a course in which students and I collect all kinds of self-expression, study their features, and then learn to write various kinds. I can see the class dividing into groups as one individual reads another's paper and recognizes a shared problem. Then I can see the groups declaring independence and writing all the genres that go into establishing a group identity.

A SAMPLE WRITING ASSIGNMENT FOR GROUP SELF-EXPRESSION

Until the time comes to start such a course, I will continue to use an assignment that I have used with some success and with a lot of fun. It's the group expressive essay assignment in the attached handout. As you can see from the exploratory sheets, students are asked to begin by listing several unorganized groups they belong to, describe each group, and identify the "enemies" of the group. Next they choose a particular group to write about and work through a series of exercises to help identify the self, others, and world of the group, and its past, present, and probable future. Finally, they sketch out a better future, that is, a set of goals for the group. Then, having done all this exploratory work, they write an essay about the group. The sample essay, "Well-Water Watchers," included with the assignment shows the kind of essay that students write. I don't offer the sample as an outstanding example, just as rather typical. I always forget to save the outstanding ones. It does show, however, how

creative students can be in identifying groups they belong to. When I assigned this paper earlier this semester, I received papers about people who eat hot foods, homemakers returning to school in middle age, Lake Ontario fishermen, snowbound residents of Simmons Road, and a host of other hitherto unrecognized groups. And all, believe it or not, are oppressed minorities in need of liberation.

I don't know how much students learned about the craft of writing from the assignment. They did learn something, I hope. But at the same time I'm sure that they learned a great deal about how and why individuals must sometimes move beyond their personal identities to become identified with groups.

ENG 102 WJM 1/85

WRITING ASSIGNMENT - GROUP EXPRESSIVE

The Assignment

Write an expressive essay in behalf of a group to which you belong. Preferably, write about a group that has not yet formally organized. For example, don't write about yourself as a female and therefore a member of a group that includes all females; females have already organized. Instead write about left-handed female Armenians, if that's a group you belong to. (I'm not ruling out entirely writing about an organized group. It depends on the group.) Before you write, consider these three aspects of the group:

Being-for-Self: What are the characteristics common to all members of the group--and which serve to identify them as members? How do the members feel about themselves and these characteristics? How did the members acquire these characteristics and what is happening to the group because of them?

Being-for-Others: Which other groups are relevant to the group in question? In what ways are they relevant? How do they regard your group, negatively or positively? How do their attitudes and actions affect your group? Who are the enemies, potential allies, and competitors?

Being-in-the-World: What is the group's status in society, the culture, the political system, and the places where group members may be found? What effects does the world have on the group? To what extent is the group taking advantage of (or being denied) the opportunities and the means offered by the world?

Discussion

Everyone has membership in hundreds of groups, some of which we recognize belonging to and others we don't know about. Usually we recognize belonging to a group when we see that we do not "fit in" with society in some way. We may feel proud of not fitting in, or we may feel discriminated against. Either way, we believe that it's important for all fellow group members to realize that they are part of the group, perhaps because with recognition may come a plan for joint action to "liberate" the group and to pursue group goals.

When writing the essay, you will probably want to state the thesis in the introduction—a thesis along the lines of "we are different because . . . ." You can lead into this essay by telling a story about something that typically happens to members of the group, by a statement of the problem which the group faces, or by any of the other usual methods of introduction.

(over)

In the body of the essay you will need to go back and forth between the "we" and the "I." Use yourself as an example of what happens to the group. If the group characteristics are things that develop across time, you may want to use chronological order for the body. If not—if, for example, you're born with the characteristics—you may want to use some other method of organization.

Exploratory Guides

You will be given several "exploratory" sheets to help you think about this paper. These sheets are not intended to be actual plans for the paper but just a means of starting ideas buzzing around in your head. Take them seriously enough that you at least try to answer the questions, but don't think that you must answer every question or that your answers must lead directly to the paper.

Attach the sheets to your final paper when you hand it in.

Rough Draft and Final Draft

I would like to see a rough draft of this paper before you write the final draft. Dates when the drafts are due will be announced.

WELL WATER WATCHERS

Living in a rural area has many benefits such as a feeling of not being cramped, enjoyment of the outdoors, and quietness. However, one accommodation that does not benefit rural areas compared to city dwellers is availability of city water. Rural sections must use wells to provide water for the household. Thus we rural people must become what I call well water watchers.

A typical well water watcher is not characterized by any physical feature or any type of garment, but rather he or she can be recognized by a thorough, self-taught education in all the areas of water usage. These areas include such things as bathing toilet flushing, and washing clothes and dishes. Now, the main difference between any man in the street and a well water watcher is this: a well water watcher must use water conservatively so the well does not run dry. A schedule is formally written out so the family members can see when they may take a bath or perhaps wash their vehicles. Usually alternate days are imposed for the activity, and the frequency per person depends on how many members are in the family.

One might think that such rules would lead to disputes within a family, but this is not so. Harmony among my family generally exists since a bond is created by our common experience. If a member of our family participates in sports and showers are accessible at the gym, that person waives his right to the home bathtub and is expected to shower at the facilities provided. In return, we may be permitted the privilege of washing our bed linens once a week rather than the scheduled requirement of once a month. We have found that this method works out very well, especially during the summer months when water usage is critical.

Proper water etiquette such as this is prevalent among neighbors,

relatives, and friends who also live in the country. As well water watchers we limit our water usage while visiting just as if we were in our own homes. This practice is welcomed and causes a common bond of understanding to be established between parties. Quite often, new relationships are created because of our dilemma. We make new acquaintances by exchanging ideas on how to make the best of our situation. This often happens at a supermarket in the aisle near the cleaning products. There we exchange information on which cleanser is the best to remove the minerals which adhere to sinks and toilets or try to determine which Tidy Bowl solution works best to cut the smell of sulfur.

Well water watchers get along fairly well until an unknowing visitor stays with us for a week or so. This visitor upsets our schedule, and within hours we know he is an abuser and we label him as such. He takes a shower every morning and always has a basket of dirty clothes to be washed. He lets the water run continuously while rinsing the dishes and thinks nothing of pulling his car into the driveway to wash it. To overcome this major inconvenience we usually take the dirty clothes and wash them at a coin-operated laundromat. We also pray for the day when our visitor departs.

Another enemy of well water watches is the carload of people who come over to party. These abusers act secretly in such a way that we can hardly overcome their constant toilet flushing. How do you ask a person to stop flushing a toilet? Well, you don't; you go downstairs and turn off the main water valve. This way a well water watcher's water is secure.

Dan Sank
English 102

GROUP EXPRESSIVE - EXPLORATORY SHEET 1

DIRECTIONS - In the spaces below, list some of the groups that you belong to, preferably groups that do not presently have formal organizations to represent them. Then briefly describe what the members of the group have in common, and identify the "enemies" of the group.

GROUP	DESCRIPTION	ENEMIES

GROUP EXPRESSIVE - EXPLORATORY SHEET 2

1. What is the group that you have chosen to write about?

2. Describe the characteristics which members of the group have in common.

3. How do members of the group feel about themselves in regard to these characteristics?

4. How did the members of the group acquire these characteristics (i.e., inherited, by choice, by circumstance)?

5. How do these characteristics affect what is happening to the group?

6. What are some possible goals for this group?

7. To what extent do members of the group recognize each other? That is, to what extent do members recognize that there are others with the same characteristics?

GROUP EXPRESSIVE - EXPLORATORY SHEET 3

1. Who are the most likely allies and friends of your group? What makes them that way?

2. To what extent are the potential allies aware of your group's existence? Are they aware that they are potential allies?

3. Who are the "enemies" of the group? What makes them enemies?

4. To what extent are the enemies aware of your group's existence? Do they know that they are enemies?

5. What attitudes and beliefs does the "general public" have about your group? How do these attitudes and beliefs affect your group?

6. If there are negative attitudes and beliefs about your group, where did they come from? Did you do anything to deserve this?

7. What positive attitudes and beliefs exist about your group? Where did they come from and how legitimate are they?

ENG 102 WJM 1/85

GROUP EXPRESSIVE - EXPLORATORY SHEET 4

1. Is there a particular physical location in which members of your group can usually be found? What is it?

2. What effects, negative or positive, does the location have on the group?

3. To what extent is the group recognized as a group by society, the political system, or the power structure? What influences does your group have with these structures?

4. What goals does/should your group have, and how can the various institutions of society help you to further these goals?

5. What powers, talents, rights, or possessions does the group have that may be used in pursuit of group goals?

6. What worldly goods does the group need to acquire to achieve its goals?